

Do's and don'ts for making the most of the National Conference

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Editor's note: *The 2018 AAP National Conference & Exhibition will take place from Nov. 2-6 in Orlando.*

If you attend the 2018 AAP National Conference & Exhibition in Orlando, you and about 15,000 other people will converge on the 7 million-square-foot Orange County Convention Center, which features 74 meeting rooms, a ballroom that seats up to 6,000 people, 2 million square feet of exhibition space and eight food courts.

You will be able to choose from more than 350 educational sessions in 70 topic areas, six special events, and scores of dining and entertainment options.

Are you overwhelmed yet?

Take a deep breath and read on to get expert advice on how to navigate the conference from planning group members Lisa B. Brown, M.D., FAAP; Rani S. Gereige, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP; Jennifer A. Miller, M.D., FAAP; Cassandra M. Pruitt, M.D., FAAP; and Todd H. Wolynn, M.D., M.M.M., FAAP. Whether you are a first-timer or veteran, you're sure to pick up some valuable tips.

Q: Do you remember the first national conference you attended? What do you wish you knew then that you know now?

Dr. Brown: The first national conference I attended was as a resident. I remember feeling invigorated by the energy of the attendees and speakers. One thing I appreciate more now than I did at the first conference is the value of attending talks outside your areas of interest or need.

Dr. Miller: I wish that I had known to network more. Talk to doctors from across the country and see how people do things differently. Attend more **plenary sessions**. While they are not always relevant to daily practice, you get exposure to important new things and new people.

Dr. Pruitt: I remember the first conference because I was overwhelmed by all the awesome programming and I remember wanting to attend everything, but you just cannot. Try to remember that programming is repeated for a reason and look for those sessions to add flexibility. I wish that I had known that the H programs (section/council programs) are open to all members, even if you don't belong to that section.

Q: What advice would you give attendees for making the most of the educational sessions? Do you have a strategy for picking sessions to attend?

Dr. Miller: I always try to pick things that help improve my daily practice, things that I struggle with when caring for patients. I review the program in advance and use the **Conference Schedule** to plan where I will be and what I will attend. If sessions overlap, I will look at the handouts to see which one I should attend.

Dr. Pruitt: Sessions will be less crowded first thing in the morning and during the last sessions in the afternoon.

Dr. Wolynn: It's a time to fill in some areas you may not know as much about. You're seeing people at the top of their fields, but they make themselves available. You can oftentimes email. You have their slides. They're willing to talk to you after sessions or in the hall. It's kind of like being at a rock concert except the rock stars will still talk to you.

Q: What advice would you give conference veterans?

Dr. Brown: Lean into the sensation of "coming home," of being with like-minded people with a similar mission of caring for all aspects of the health of children.

Dr. Gereige: Give the planning group feedback on what you like and what you would like to see implemented. Reach out to new attendees and make them feel welcome and engaged.

Dr. Pruitt: Try out the council/section programs. They are often outstanding. Also, attend the [Pediatric Bowl](#). It reminds us all of where we started and energizes you. Plus, it is highly entertaining.

Dr. Wolynn: Connect to the newer people coming to the conference. It's a nice opportunity to help people as they're coming up through the ranks.

Q: How can attendees get the most out of networking?

Dr. Brown: Attend some smaller sessions, which are set up to encourage small group discussions, and you will have ample opportunity to network with others in your group. Attend your district events, such as breakfasts and receptions.

Dr. Gereige: The National Conference has created a community to foster networking and mentorship. Seasoned attendees should reach out to new attendees. Attend social events, receptions and your regional breakfast. Bring business cards to share. Sit with people you do not know or you have not met before. Talk to poster presenters especially if it is an area of interest to you.

Dr. Miller: There are many alumni sessions from residency programs and hospitals. The [President's Welcome Reception](#) is a nice way to meet AAP staff and leaders, and the Business Lunch gives a birds-eye view into the organization. Point-counterpoint sessions also stimulate conversations, so that you can network. Finally, the [exhibit hall](#) is a great place to network. When standing in line to get giveaways, talk to the folks next to you.

Dr. Wolynn: Get to know the section, council or committee that represents the work that you do. We're looking for new blood. We're looking for the next generation of leaders within the AAP and across the United States.

Q: Do you have any do's and don'ts?

Dr. Brown: Do attend the [plenary sessions](#). Some of the most inspirational talks in the last few years have come from these sessions, and it is not possible to predict which will be the stand-out, motivating event on any given day.

Dr. Gereige: Look at the calendar ahead of time and create your own agenda on the mobile app. Rank order the sessions that you absolutely do not want to miss. Make an effort to reconnect with old friends and make new friends. Fill out the evaluations. Don't feel overwhelmed by the app if technology is not your thing. Seek help from AAP staff.

Dr. Pruitt: Bring a laptop. Most presentations have an electronic handout. Don't miss the Saturday night event at [Universal's Islands of Adventure](#).

Dr. Wolynn: Don't forget to enjoy yourself. The AAP-sponsored events are always amazing. There's such benefit from trying to connect to other people because we're really all doing the same work of caring for kids. Definitely use the app. It gives you a chance to get the handouts, rate speakers, it gives you maps and resources.

Q: How can attendees stay refreshed and energized?

Dr. Brown: Attend talks on advocacy. Participate in the [Community Cares Project](#) and attend the [Pediatric Bowl!](#) This annual competition between local residencies is exciting, creatively written and hosted, and great fun! On a break between talks, go for a long walk or a run and/or take part in the annual [5K Friends of Children Fun Run & Walk](#).

Dr. Gereige: Get enough sleep and stay active (e.g., run, work out, do yoga, explore the city). Connect with old friends and make new friends.

Dr. Miller: Stay hydrated. Make lunch and/or dinner plans with friends or family to balance work and play. Check out the massage stations in the exhibit hall, go to active sessions like audience response sessions, try seminars that are active, and participate in the community service activity.

Dr. Pruitt: Eat lunch outside in the restaurants that are just down the street from the convention center. There is a lot of variety and different price points. Also, stop by the Health and Wellness Center for a mid-day stretch.

Q: What's one thing new attendees might not think about before coming but would help them?

Dr. Brown: Plan to arrive at the sessions five to 10 minutes before they start, as seats often fill up quickly.

Dr. Gereige: I encourage new attendees to explore the mobile app and create your own schedule ahead of time. The app also allows you to connect with others.

Dr. Miller: The conference is fun, but it can be exhausting as well. Pace yourself.

Dr. Wolynn: I think it makes it less of an intimidating kind of experience if you have the ability to connect with people ahead of time. One way to do that is to become active in a section or committee or council that is relevant to what you do. You're guaranteed to connect with some of these people.

Q: What should attendees definitely pack in their suitcase?

Dr. Gereige: A light jacket that you can put on if a meeting room is too cold, your pedometer, comfortable shoes and workout clothes.

Dr. Miller: An extra bag to carry back all of your purchases and freebies from the exhibit hall.

Dr. Pruitt: A refillable water bottle/container. There will be plenty of ways to refill it at the convention center.

Dr. Wolynn: A phone charging cord.

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